

Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān

The International Journal
of Ancient Iranian Studies

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- Memory and History: The Construction of the Past in Late Antique Persia / Touraj Daryaee
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In the Name of God

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Memory and History: The Construction of the Past in Late Antique Persia

Touraj Daryaee

California State University, Fullerton

On four plates, two gold and two silver, placed at Persepolis, Darius I demarcates the limits of his empire in the following fashion (DPh):

*dārayavauš Xš vazraka Xš Xšyānām Xš
dahyūvnām vištāspahyā puça haxāmanišiya
θātiy dārayavauš Xš ima xšačam tya adam
dārayāmiy hacā sakaibiš tyaiy para sugdam amata
yātā ā kūšā hacā hidaυ amata yātā ā spardā tyamaiy
auramazdā frābarahya maθišta bagānām mām
auramazdā pātuv utāmai y viθam*

Darius the great king, king of kings
king of countries, son of Wištāspā, an Achaemenid,
says king Darius, this realm which I possess
from the Sakas who are beyond Sogdiana to
Kush, from Sind to Sardis which Ahura Mazda,
the greatest of the Gods gave me, may Ahura Mazda
protect me and my royal clan.¹

This Persian empire which originated from the province Persis, during its largest extent spanned most of Southwest Asia, including parts of North Africa and Arabia.

1. R. G. Kent, *Old Persian Grammar, Text, Lexicon*, Second Edition, American Oriental Society, Connecticut, 1953, pp. 136-137.

The Achaemenids left an indelible mark on the memory of the people they conquered, especially the Egyptians, Hebrews, and the Greeks who had been subjugated by them. The Achaemenid presence in the history of the neighboring people was so important that even in Late Antiquity, when the Sasanian Persians made incursions into Syria and further west, it was seen in the eyes of the Romans and others as the regeneration of Achaemenid Persia and the continuation of their imperialistic policies. Between the time when Alexander the Great brought an end to the Achaemenid Empire and the beginning of the Sasanian Empire, half a millennium had elapsed. The Sasanians in the third century CE rose from the same province as the Achaemenids did and both were imperialistic in their foreign policy and shared a number of characteristics. Is it possible that such an important empire, i.e., the Achaemenids, which left their mark in the memory and history of the people whom they fought with and / or conquered, could not have been remembered by the Persians of the Sasanian period? The question of whether the Sasanians had a memory of the Achaemenids has caused much debate among modern historians of the ancient world, and yet there is no conclusive answer to this enigma.

At first to question this historical remembrance of the most important and powerful empire (Achaemenid) that the world had seen by the Sasanians seems absurd.² How could it be that the Sasanian Persians, who were from the very same province as the Achaemenids, could not have remembered their “ancestors” and would not have referred to them as a precedent in their imperialistic policies? How could it be that they left us inscriptions at Persepolis which was the Achaemenid palace, blessing the people who built this monument, or leaving the largest cluster of rock reliefs just below Achaemenid tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam in Persis and not know about the Achaemenids?³ How is it possible that some of the people who lived around or inside the Sasanian empire

2. The reason that I call this absurd has nothing to do with the people who question this issue, rather the overwhelming scholarly support before the 1970s for the idea that the Sasanians remembered the Achaemenids which is assembled by Kettenhofen and given in short reference here; G. Rawlinson, *The Seventh Great Oriental Monarchy*, p.12; F. Justi, “Geschichte des alten Persien,” *Grundriss der Iranischen Philologie*, p. 177; J. de Morgan, *Numismatique de la Perse antique*, fasc. 3, col. 557; Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthians and Sassanians*, p. 133; E. Porada, *Alt-Iran: die Kunst in vorislamischer Zeit*, p. 191; M. Jean Gaje, *La montée des Sassanides et l'heure de Palmyre*, p. 121; W. Ensslin, “Severus Alexander: Foreign Policy,” *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. xii, 1939, pp. 68-72; M. Benier, “L’empire romain de l’avènement des Sévères au concile de Nicée,” *Histoire Romaine*, vol. iv / 1, Paris, 1937, p. 106. More recently see J. Wieshöfer, “Iranische Ansprüche an Rom auf ehemals achaimenidische Territorien,” *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, vol. 19, 1986, pp. 177-185.

3. J. Wieshöfer, *Das antike Persien. Von 550 v. Chr. bis 650 n. Chr.*, München-Zürich, 1994, pp. 207-208.

remembered the Achaemenid Persians, but we are to believe that the Sasanians themselves were oblivious to this historical memory? Evidence has been presented that indeed this theory has some merits and that the Sasanians may not have remembered the Achaemenids.

E. Yarshater based on the textual evidence, E. Kettenhofen based on the Classical sources, and Michael Roaf in dealing with architecture in their respective essays have demonstrated that we should not assume necessarily that the Sasanians remembered the Achaemenids. To my knowledge the first person to voice an opinion against the common belief that the Sasanians may not have remembered the Achaemenids was the great nineteenth century orientalist, Th. Nöldeke.⁴ Ninety years later in his famous article, Yarshater pointed out that this historical amnesia had developed through a long historical process. He further elucidated that it is only the Classical sources that tell us that the Sasanians remembered the Achaemenids, and that the Sasanian sources are silent on this matter.⁵ He concluded by stating that if the Sasanians remembered anyone, it was the Parthians (247 BCE-224 CE) who had been dethroned by the Sasanian dynasty and not the Achaemenids.⁶ Kettenhofen also dealt with the problem of the Classical sources quoting Ardashir I (224-240 CE) and his son Šābuhr I's (240-270 CE) statements and aspirations, and how unlikely these statements would have been. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, Herodian and Zonaras the Sasanians were trying to revive the Achaemenid empire and restore the Achaemenid Persian empire,⁷ which now Kettenhofen showed was the product of Classical historiography and it was not authentic Sasanian testimony.⁸ Roaf believes

4. Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden*, Leiden, 1879, p. 3; among the few who followed Nöldeke's ideas was Th. Mommsen, *The Provinces of the Roman Empire*, Barnes and Noble, 1885 (reprint 1996), vol. ii, p. 3.

5. E. Yarshater, "Were the Sasanians Heirs to the Achaemenids?" *La Persia nel Medioevo*, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Roma, 1971, p. 519. "Could Ardashir's accurate knowledge of the Achaemenids and his pride in such powerful ancestors have been so completely lost on his descendants who could equally share his pride? A positive response would land us in a tangle of confusing difficulties. Rather, it seems to me that the Roman governors whom Herodian quotes were drawing on their own knowledge of the Persian past as preserved in Greek sources, rather than quoting Ardashir literally," p. 525.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 531.

7. Herodian, *Herodian's History*, Cambridge, 1969, 4.2.2; Dio Cassius, *Dio's Roman History*, Cambridge, 1993, p. 483; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, Cambridge, 1986, 27.4-6.

8. E. Kettenhofen, "Die Einforderung des Achämenidenerbtes Durch Ardašīr: Eine Interpretatio Romana," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*, vol. 15, 1984, p. 190; *idem.*, "Einige Überlegungen zur sasanidischen Politik gegenüber Rom im 3. jh. N. Chr.," *The Roman and Byzantine Army in the East*, ed. E. Dabrowa, Cracow, 1994, pp. 99-108.

that the imitation of the Achaemenid monuments by the Sasanians did not really suggest a historical remembrance of the first Persian dynasty, and in the minds of the Sasanians they were copying Kayānid monuments.⁹ In modern times Yarshater was the one who really questioned this historical link; Kettenhofen demonstrated the fabrication of the Classical sources; and Roaf cut the link between the two Persian empires architecturally.

In this essay it is intended to tackle the question in another way. Rather than just denying or confirming Sasanian memory of the Achaemenids I would like to suggest that the process was more complicated and that there were several ideas and political propaganda at work. The denial of Sasanian memory of the Achaemenids, however faint cannot be denied altogether. There can be little doubt of this even if the Classical sources are not giving the Persian side of the picture. But it is also clear that there is no explicit mention of the Achaemenids in the Sasanian material, especially in the *Res Gestae Divi Saporis*.¹⁰ Secondly, I would like to suggest why the Sasanians might have forsaken the Achaemenids and their memory in their historiography. This will become clear by looking at the nature of historiography in Late Antiquity and the issue of memory versus history, which as the title of this essay demonstrates, is influenced by the work of French historians, namely P. Norra and G. Le Goff who have dealt with memory, history, and the way in which societies construct their past.

If we accept Yarshater, Kettenhofen, and Roaf's hypotheses that the Classical sources are the product of Greco-Roman historiography, which is almost certain, we should ask what is there in the Persian tradition itself which suggests a connection between the Achaemenids and the Sasanians. The *Shāhnāme* (book of kings) which is basically the epic form of the Sasanian *Xwdāy-nāmag* can be trusted as genuine Persian tradition. This is because the Middle Persian sources, such as some chapters in the Zoroastrian encyclopedic works, the *Bundahišn* and the *Dēnkard* give us an encapsulated version of the Persian epic. In the Zoroastrian version of Sasanian historiography, Gayōmard begins the history of humanity, followed by the Pēšdādids and the Kayānids who battle the enemies of *Ērān-šahr*

9. M. Roaf, "Persepolitan Echoes in Sasanian Architecture: Did the Sasanians attempt to re-create the Achaemenid empire?" *The Art and Archaeology of Ancient Persia, New Light on the Parthian and Sasanian Empires*, V.S. Curtis, R. Hillenbrand, J.M. Rogers, I.B. Tauris, eds., London & New York, 1998, p. 6.

10. For the idea that the regions being claimed by Šābuhr I are really the territories which the Sasanians saw as belonging to them, which were contested with the Romans, and not to the Achaemenids see Z. Rubin, "The Roman Empire in the *Res Gestae Divi Saporis* – the Mediterranean World in Sāsānian Propaganda," *Electrum, Ancient Iran and the Mediterranean World*, vol. 2, 1998, pp. 177-186.

“Iran.” In this historiography by the time of the last Kayānid ruler, Wištāsp, Zoroaster had been able to propagate his religion. From then onwards, the situation becomes confusing; a Wahman comes to kingship, and then when all legitimate male heirs are killed, a woman by the name of Homāy becomes the ruler.¹¹ Then the text mentions a ruler named *Dārā ī Dārāyān*,¹² who is presumably Darius III who was defeated by Alexander the Great, who burns the sacred books of the Zoroastrians (*Avesta*) and sends a copy to *Hrōm* “Rome.”¹³ The focus then shifts to Ardashīr I and the rest of the Sasanian kings.¹⁴ Ardashīr I’s genealogy is given in the following manner in a late Middle Persian source:

*ardaxšīr ī kay ī pābagān ī az tohmag ī
sāsān ud nāf ī dārāy šāh*¹⁵

Ardaxšīr, the Kayānid, son of Pābag from the parentage
of Sāsān and from the lineage of King Darius (III).

This array of titulature and genealogical connection reflects a late Sasanian perspective on their ancestry. Here Ardashīr is known as a Kayānid ruler which reflects late Sasanian preoccupation with the Kayānid dynasty, which will be discussed later in this essay. But what can be said here in terms of these titles is that in other Middle Persian text another Ardashīr exists who precedes *Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān* and is recalled in this fashion:

*... xwadāyīh ī ardaxšīr ī kay kē wahman ī spandīdādān
xwānīhēd kē dēw az mardōmān judāg kunēd be
pālāyēd hamāg gēhān dēn rawāg kunēd*

11. This scenario is echoed in the late Sasanian period, when all the male heirs were killed by Kawād II, his sister, Queen Bōrān took the throne.

12. It is plausible to see in *dārā ī dārāyān* the Achaemenid dynasty, that is from Darius I to Darius III. It has been shown that Darius I was able to bring to power another line of the Achaemenid family and that Cyrus and Cambyses were from an alternative family line. Is it possible that the Sasanians could have remembered such a fact? This would imply that Cyrus had a secondary role in Achaemenid history itself after Darius I.

13. The mention of Rome rather than Greece should tell us that here we are dealing with Sasanian historiography, where past events are placed in the political context of Late Antiquity. This of course also demonstrates the static view of history for the Sasanians, perhaps accepting Roman propaganda that they were the continuation of the Greeks. Again the invasion of the Persian empire by foreign enemies and the destruction of the sacred text and religion appears to be cyclical and the Sasanians recorded this.

14. M. Bahār, *Pažūhešī dar asāīr-e Iran*, Agah Publishers, Tehran, 1375, pp. 184-185.

15. *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān*, in S.H. Nyberg, *A Manual of Pahlavi*, Part I, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1964, p. 6.18-19.

... the rulership of Ardashīr, the Kayānid who will
be called Wahman the son of Spandiyād, who will
separate the demons from people, he will purify
the whole world, (and) will make the religion current.¹⁶

It has recently been shown that *Ardaxšīr ī Kay* is to be identified with Artaxerxes II, which has important implications for Sasanian historical memory of the Achaemenids. This is significant in that Artaxerxes II was connected with the establishment of the cult of Anāhīd in the Persian empire. The Sasanians are connected with the Anāhīd fire-temple which was probably established by the Achaemenid king of kings and was the center of the Persian warriors, which, under the control of the Sasanians, became a major center of anti-Parthian activity.¹⁷ Finally Darius III is again mentioned. Thus, now three Achaemenid kings were remembered.¹⁸

These literary remains along with the intense Sasanian devotion and establishment of monuments along with the Achaemenid ones suggests a respect and some memory. Another important connection between the Achaemenid memory and the Sasanians would be through the oral tradition. The Arsacids who temporally ruled in between the two Persian empires had a strong minstrel tradition which transmitted stories of the Achaemenid along with those of the Kayānid kings.¹⁹ This oral tradition was already at work in the Achaemenid period, when stories of kings were recited and rehearsed with songs which lasted through the Sasanian period.²⁰

16. With minor changes C. Cereti, *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn, A Zoroastrian Apocalypse*, Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, Roma, 1995, p. 152.

17. M. Boyce was the first to identify *Ardaxšīr ī Kay* with Artaxerxes II, M. Boyce and F. Grenet, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 3, *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1991, p. 385; now also S. Amir-Arjomand, "Artaxerxes, Ardashīr, and Bahman," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 118.2, 1998, pp. 245-248.

18. The three would be the two Dariuses and Artaxerxes II.

19. M. Boyce, "Some Remarks on the Transmission of the Kayanian Heroic Cycle," *Serta Cantabrigiensia. Studies Presented to the XXII International Congress of Orientalists*, Mainz, 1954, p. 49; *idem.*, "The Parthian gosan and Iranian Minstrel Tradition," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1957, p. 12.

20. Strabo, *Geography*, Cambridge, 1930, 15.3.18; in regard to stories about Cyrus see Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, Cambridge, 1925, I.ii.1. Also see H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "The Death of Cyrus," *Papers in Honor of Professor Mary Boyce*, *Acta Iranica* 11, 1985, p. 462. For the pre-Achaemenid Iranian tradition of court poets see I. Gershevitch, "Old Iranian Literature," *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, Band 2, *Iranistik-Literature*, Leiden and Cologne, 1968, p. 2. For the importance of the oral tradition in Achaemenid and Sasanian Persia see P.O. Skjærva, "Thematic and Linguistic

There are still other avenues in which we can give more plausibility to the idea that the Sasanians could have known about the Achaemenids. While the Classical sources have been the focus of the debate, no one has looked at the other sources which were the product of the time of Late Antiquity. When reading through what has been called non-religious Middle Persian texts produced during the Sasanian period, one can see the close relations between the Sasanian monarchs and their Jewish subjects, especially the leaders of the community. Was there a precedence for such a co-operation? For example in the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērān-šahr* (The Provincial Capitals of Ērān) several Sasanian kings and princes are said to have been born from the marriages between the Sasanian kings and Jewish women (ŠĒ 10):

šahrestān ī xwārazm narsēh ī jahūdagān kard

The city of Xwārazm was built by Narseh,
the son of the Jewess.

also (ŠĒ 47):

*šahrestān [ī] šūs ud šūstar šīšīnduxt zan ī yazdgird
ī šābuhrān kard ēiyōn duxt ī rēš-galūdag jahūdagān
šāh mād-iz ī wahrām ī gōr būd*

The city of Šuš (Susa) and Shushtar were built by
Šīšīnduxt, the wife of Yazdgerd, the son of Šābuhr,
since she was the daughter of Resh Galut, the king of
the Jews and also the mother of Wahrām Gōr.

Middle Persian *Reš Galut* is the Aramaic form of *Resh Galutha*, "Leader of the Exile." We know of this close association between the Jews and the Sasanians from non-Sasanian sources as well. These references are from the time of Yazdgerd I (399-420 CE) who, according to the Talmudic sources, was in close contact with the Jewish community. It is even said that Yazdgerd addressed the rabbis with courtesy, cited scriptures to them, and of course married a Jewess, i.e.,

Parallels in the Achaemenian and Sassanian Inscriptions," *Papers in Honor of Professor Mary Boyce*, Acta Iranica 11, 1985, p. 593; *idem.*, "Royalty in Early Iranian Literature," *Proceedings of the Third European Conference of Iranian Studies*, Part I, Old and Middle Iranian Studies, N. Sims-Williams, ed., Wiesbaden, 1998, pp. 99-107; and P. Huyse, "Noch einmal zu Parallelen zwischen Achaemeniden- und Sasanideninschriften," *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, vol. 23, 1990, pp. 177-183; for Sasanian Persia see V. Sarkhosh Curtis, "Minstrels in Ancient Iran," *The Art and Archaeology of Ancient Persia, New Light on the Parthian and Sasanian Empires*, V. Sarkhosh Curtis et al., eds., I. B. Tauris Publishers, London and New York, 1998, pp. 182-187.

Šīšīnduxt.²¹ This again may be the product of Jewish historiography and propaganda, but one cannot deny the historicity of the contacts between the Sasanians and the Jews.

The Jews could have been the most important source of the transmission of knowledge about the Achaemenids to the Sasanians, even if the Sasanians were uninformed about the Achaemenids independently. The remembrance of the Achaemenids in the Bible is very important. Of course Middle Persian versions of the Bible were at hand during Late Antiquity. Theodoret in the fifth century CE states that a translation of the Bible was made into Middle Persian.²² Are we to believe that the Zoroastrian priests, who were able to have good knowledge of the Semitic religions as is evidenced by the *Škand ī Gumānīg Wizār*, where they were able to critique and analyze the story of Genesis and others in detail, were somehow unable to do this two or three centuries earlier? That is, were they unable to study and gain knowledge from the Jews or from the translation of foreign texts about the Achaemenid Persians at the height of their power?

In the *Talmud* as well there is reference to whether the story of Esther could be recited in Persian or not, which suggests that orally conveying the stories about the Achaemenids was also possible.²³ The story of Esther was central to this transmission of Achaemenid knowledge by the Jews to the Sasanians. Not only the Bible reflects the Jewish fascination with the Achaemenids, but also the frescos at Dura-Europos suggest remembering of the story in Late Antiquity.

This brings us to the Dura-Europos synagogue in Syria, where another important and vital piece of information is given in regard to Sasanian understanding of the Biblical story of Esther. During the time of Šābuhr I (240-270 CE), Sasanian officials met at Dura-Europos, where they visited the synagogue. One of the best-preserved and elaborate frescos represents the Biblical story of Esther. The scene represents Ahasuerus (Artaxerxes / Ardaxšīr) on a throne who is receiving a message in the presence of the Jews. Mordecai is on a royal horse which is held by Haman. What is important is that several Middle Persian graffiti are present, placed on the scene which have been

21. J. Neusner, "Jews in Iran," *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3(2), E. Yarshater, ed., Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 915.

22. S. Munk, *Notice sur Rabbi Saadia Gaon et sa version arabe d'saie et sur une version persane manuscrite de la Bibliothèque Royale*, Paris, 1838; Sh. Shaked, "Middle Persian Translations of the Bible," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. iv, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and New York, 1990, p. 207.

23. Shaked, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

attributed to the third century CE. These inscriptions were dated as 255 and 256 CE.²⁴

Elisaus tells us that during the time of Yazdgerd II (438-457 CE), the court and king were told about the stories of the Bible regarding the Persians and the treatment of the Jews by the Achaemenids.²⁵ The translation of the Bible into other Middle Iranian languages is still in existence which was probably the work of Christian missionaries in the Sasanian empire, and in Central Asia.²⁶ The Judeo-Persian tradition is certainly rich in Achaemenid stories,²⁷ which demonstrates the continuity of this memory among the Jews of Persia.²⁸ The Jews reminded the Sasanian Persians of this glorious past, when the Achaemenids ruled Asia and were tolerant of all people, especially the Jews. According to the *Talmud* the rabbis tried to escape paying taxes in the early fourth century CE on the grounds that in the Achaemenid period King Artaxerxes had excused them.²⁹ Thus the coexistence of the Jews and Persians in the Sasanian period mirrors those of the Achaemenid period.

When looking at the local histories written in Persian, such as the *Fārsnāme* of Ibn Balxī, one gets the sense that the Jews were an important source of information. In this text, beside Darius III, another Darius is mentioned as Darius the Great. It is interesting that in this twelfth century CE text we are told that one of the great things Darius the Great did was to establish *dīwan ī barīd*, i.e., a postal system which has been assigned to Darius I.³⁰ Also in the text, Bahman (Wahman of the Middle Persian texts) is given the epithet of *derāz dast*, i.e., *Longimanus*, belonging to Artaxerxes I. The text even mentions Cyrus whose epithet is given “*ašašwariš*” which may be the corrupt form of *Haxāmaniš* “Achaemenid.” The text states that his mother was Jewish, and that he was circumcised in the Jewish tradition and made Jerusalem prosper again, and his wife was Jewish as well.³¹ The text claims that the Sasanians are the descendants of him, and although this is probably the product of Jewish propaganda, it demonstrates that the Jews made

24. M. Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europos and its Art*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1938, pp. 112-113.

25. Neusner, *op. cit.*, p. 890.

26. N. Sims-Williams, “Sogdian Translations of the Bible,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. iv, Routledge & Kegan Paul, New York and London, 1990, p. 207.

27. A. Netzer, “Some Notes on the Characterization of Cyrus the Great in the Jewish and Judeo-Persian Writings,” *Acta Iranica, Hommage Universel*, E.J. Brill, 1974, p. 35.

28. J. P. Asmussen, “Judeo-Persian Translations of the Bible,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. iv, Routledge & Kegan Paul, New York and London, 1990, p. 268.

29. Neusner, *op. cit.*, p. 920.

30. Ibn Balxī, *Fārsnāme*, G. Le Strange *et al.*, eds., Cambridge University Press, 1921, p. 55.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

their connection to the Achaemenids known. Then if according to the Jews the Achaemenids had been Jewish, their descendants, i.e., the Sasanians also were Jewish in origin.

Thus there is enough indirect evidence to suggest that the Sasanians should have had some knowledge about the Achaemenids, and Shahbazi has also endorsed the idea that at least the early Sasanians knew about the Achaemenids.³² But the question is, why then did the Sasanians not propagate them in their historiography? Why is this connection implicit and not explicit? To give the reason for this aim of the Sasanians, to which I have given some preliminary answers,³³ one should briefly examine the nature of historiography in Late Antiquity, where we can use the Roman historiography as an example. From the third century CE and with Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, we begin to see history unfold in a Biblical/Christian setting in the west. In this historiography, Biblical personages are incorporated into the history of humanity and that of the Roman empire. In Sasanian Persia attitudes began to change at the same time as well, especially during the rule of Šābuhr II in the fourth century CE. The coins of Šābuhr II are the last coins to call the king "whose origin is from the gods," losing their divine nature and descent on the coinage which was mass-produced.³⁴ This may have been partly due to the Zoroastrian religious hierarchy which had taken firm hold in the empire and, like the Catholic church of the Middle Ages, was an emerging powerful force.³⁵ Thus in Late Antiquity a shift began from "divine descent" to what can be called an "Avestan descent." This was much like the situation in the Eastern Roman empire, where the sacred text supplied a new beginning of the history of humanity, and where Jewish kings became a model of emulation. In Persia, one

32. A. Sh. Shahbazi believes that the early Sasanians knew about the Achaemenids and the shift to the Kayānid ideology took place during the time of Šābuhr II, "Early Sasanians' Claim to Achaemenid Heritage," *Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān*, The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies, vol. 1, no. 1, Spring and Summer 2001, p. 69. I agree with his assessment. See my review of *The Art and Archaeology of Ancient Persia: New Light on the Parthian and Sasanian Empires*, V. Sarkhosh Curtis, et al., eds., in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 33, nos. 1-2, 2000, p. 240.

33. T. Daryaee, "National History or Keyanid History: The Nature of Sasanid Zoroastrian Historiography," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 28, nos. 3-4, 1995, pp. 129-141; also see my review of Wischöfer's article on Ardashīr for *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, "Sasanian Persia (ca. 224-651 CE)," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 31, nos. 3-4, 1998, pp. 433-434.

34. On the private seal of the kings in the fifth century CE this title still. Ph. Gignoux has recently published a seal of Kawād whose son, Yazdgird still has the title of *kē čīhr az yazadān*, "A Propos de l'airiāna vaējah," *Studia Iranica*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2000, pp. 164-165.

35. M. Morony, "Sāsānids," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, C. E. Bosworth et al., eds., 1996, pp. 74-75.

can argue that the Avestan dynasties of the Pēšdādids, but especially the Kayānids, became the focal point of the Sasanians as mentioned in their sacred text. Now the Sasanians were not the kings whose ancestors were the Achaemenids but rather those reflected in the *Avesta*.

This shift to "Kayānid ideology" is evident from their coins at the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century, where the legends on the coins for the first time reads *rām-šahr* "(who) maintains peace in the realm." This title is used by two Sasanian kings, Yazdgerd I (399-420 CE) and Wahrām V (420-438 CE),³⁶ which incidentally is the title for the last Kayānid king, Wištāsp, in the Parthian epic, the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān*.³⁷ Then the title *kay* (Kayānid) appears and later another word associated with the Kayānids in the *Avesta*, i.e., *xwarrah* (Glory).³⁸ Furthermore, this new historiography which can termed a "sacred historiography," began with the *Avesta* and the Sasanians became the descendants of the Kayānids.

It should also be noted that we must make a distinction between memory and history, rather than the idea of amnesia vs. history which Yarshater had touched upon. Nora, who deals with modern history, has already made important comments on the difference, distinction, and even opposition between memory and history.³⁹ Le Goff, among others who have dealt with the issue of memory at length,⁴⁰ has

36. The legend reads: *mazdysn bgy l'mštry ... MLK'n MLK'*. In a paper titled "Early Sasanian Titulature," in the Memorial Volume for R. Göbl in *Society for Ancient Numismatics I* have given a longer discussion of the changes in title and the power struggle between the king and the priests at the time of Šābuhr II and his Mowbed Adūurbād ī Mahrspandān which was written in Spring of 1999 and is yet to appear. See also my comments on this shift during the reign of Šābuhr II in review of *The Art and Archaeology of Ancient Persia*, Curtis, Hillenbrand, Rogers, eds., in *Iranian Studies*, Winter 2000. Wiesehöfer has also noted the power of the Zoroastrian priests during the reign of Šābuhr II, *Ancient Persia*, I.B. Tauris, London and New York, 1997, p. 213.

37. D. Monchi-Zadeh, *Die Geschichte Zarēr's*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensia, vol. 4, Uppsala, 1981, p. 35; B. Gheybi, *Ayādgār ī Zarērān*, Pahlavi Literature Series, Nemudar Publications, Bielefeld, 1999, p. 21; "Who maintains peace in the realm." If we accept that this title was already known to be a Kayānid title in the Sasanian period through the *AZ*, then its adoption by Yazdgerd I and Wahrām V is the earliest indication of the adoption of Kayānid titles by the Sasanian kings, preceding *kay*.

38. T. Daryaei, "The Use of Religio-Political Propaganda on the Coinage of Xusrō II," *Journal of the American Numismatic Society*, vol. 7, 1997, pp. 41-53.

39. P. Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, vol. 26, Spring 1989, pp. 7-8.

40. See also J. Le Goff and P. Nora's three volume edited work, *Faire de l'histoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1974, where they make important comments on the issue of constructing the past in the

made very important statements about the ancient and medieval periods.⁴¹ In his comments on pre-literate and literate societies, Le Goff touched upon ideas that are applicable to the Sasanians as well. He believed that a collective memory could be organized around three themes in which the first two can be applied to the Sasanian period. The first was the collective identity which was based on myths, particularly the myth of origin. For the Sasanians this was the idea of *Ērān* “Iran” and its people which was transposed from somewhere in Central Asia in the collective memory of the Persians as mentioned in the *Avesta* onto the Sasanian territory of *Ērān*. Secondly, the theme that was emphasized was the prestige of the leading families that is expressed in genealogy.⁴² This again is evident by the Sasanian adoption of Kayānid titles and the connection they made to the Kayānids in their genealogy. Ardaxšīr I, in the Middle Persian sources was known as *ardaxšīr ī kay* (Ardaxšīr, the descendant of the Kayānids).

In the Sasanian period it appears that memory was removed from the temporal realm, which separated memory from history. Memory was divinized which obstructed the endeavor to explore the past. Thus, depending on the orientation, memory did lead away from history.⁴³ This is exactly what took place in Late Antiquity in Persia, where this “memory” which focused on sacred history became separate from the “actual history” of which the Classical sources knew. Although historical personages, such as Darius III and Alexander were mentioned, they were used to reinforce the collective memory (Zoroastrian memory) based on Kayānid ideology mentioned in the *Avesta*. The overall scheme of the *Avesta* as used by the Sasanians was that in the beginning, the Kayānids ruled *Ērān* with the blessing of Ahura Mazda and the other deities. Then, the sacred land had been taken over by anti-Zoroastrian personages, such as Alexander and the legitimacy of rulers had withered. Now the Sasanians who were related to the Kayānids were able to recapture the land and with the aid of Ahura Mazda and other deities establish their rule and again bring about the rightful sovereignty. This Zoroastrian collective memory was leading away from the Greco-Roman historiographical tradition which remembered the Achaemenids and the Parthians. The *Avesta* did not have memory of the Achaemenids. Still Roman, Jewish and Christian

introduction. For modern views also see, A. Dirlik, “Whither History? Encounters with Historism, Postmodernism, Postcolonialism,” *History After the Three Worlds, Post-Eurocentric Historiographies*, A. Dirlik, V. Bahl, and P. Gran, eds., Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford, 2000, pp. 241-257.

41. J. Le Goff, *History and Memory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 65; J. P. Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs. Etudes de psychologie historique*, Paris, 1965, pp. 73-74.

traditions may have also enforced certain pressures on the collective memory of the Persians in the province of Persis, mentioning Achaemenid greatness. Thus this selective amnesia of the Sasanians was for particular reasons, mainly due to the creation of a collective memory or “sacred historiography.”

The most relevant statement of Le Goff for our study is in relation to the developments in Europe which parallel the situation in Sasanian Persia, where in the following passage “Christianity” can be replaced by “Zoroastrianism”: “The collective memory formed by the leading classes of society undergoes profound transformations in the Middle Ages. The essential change derives from the spread of Christianity as a religion and as a dominant ideology and from the quasi-monopoly the Church acquires in the intellectual domain. The Christianization of memory and the mnemotechnology, the division of collective memory between a circular liturgical memory and the lay memory of the dead and especially of dead saints, the importance of memory in an educational system depending on both the oral and the written, and finally the appearance of treatises on memory – these are the most characteristic traits of memory in the Middle Ages.”⁴⁴ For Zoroastrian Persia, memory also went through profound change as a result of the spread of the religion, and Zoroastrianism became the dominant ideology among the nobility, the elite, and the state. The Zoroastrian priests accentuated their beliefs at the local level in the fire-temples by teaching the masses the sacred hymns and the Avestan stories of the Kayānid kings (Avestan Yašts) orally. Beside the Zoroastrian priesthood, the state also took it upon itself to highlight the connection between the Sasanians and the Avestan dynasties. By the late Sasanian period a “Zoroastrianisation of memory” had been created in Persia.

This “Zoroastrianisation of memory” meant that a new way of looking at the past had developed in Sasanian Persia which was part of what can be called “Kayānid ideology.” In this sacred memory / history which was created during the Sasanian period, the Achaemenids were only important in terms of their function as transmitters of the holy religion and the text, which was brought to an end by Alexander. But for Sasanian historiography, they were insignificant, because the new way of looking at their past was found in the sacred text, with the Pēšdādids and especially the Kayānids who had ruled *Ērān*. The Achaemenids were compressed and synchronized with the Kayānid kings in the new history, who sometimes took their epithets as found in al-Bērunī’s list of Kayānid kings.⁴⁵

This omission of the Achaemenids from their historical memory seems to have been selective and on purpose. Even though the Classical sources were portraying

44. Le Goff, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

45. Daryaei, “National History,” p. 134.

a false image of the Sasanian memory of the Achaemenids, certainly we cannot deny that the Jews whose leadership was in close contact with the court would not have reminded them of the past history of Persia and the Achaemenids and their benevolence towards the Jews. When the Sasanians left their inscriptions on the structure at Persepolis or rock-reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam, it meant that they saw the former structures as important and their own as their successors.

It is more of an issue for modern scholars to identify correctly the builders of the structures with the Achaemenids than it was for the Sasanians, since whoever they were, be it Achaemenids or others, they were now to be identified as Kayānid monuments according to the new historiography. The fathers of the Sasanians and their forefathers *ny'kn W hsynkn* who were remembered and blessed, were the same people who built these structures which we know in modern times to have been the Achaemenids. But for all practical purposes by the time of Šābuhr II, the Sasanians saw their fathers and forefathers to have been the Kayānids.⁴⁶

Then for this reason by the late Sasanian period Persepolis was called *Taxt ī Jamšīd* (Yima's throne).⁴⁷ From the time of Šābuhr II, history had become sacred and written or memorized in a new light. The Sasanians saw themselves as the heirs to the Kayānids who held the *xwarrah* "glory" and were rulers of *Ērān-šahr*. This memory was what was to be emulated by the king of kings who was from Persis, where the Achaemenids were from, but who had now adopted an "Avestan" outlook. With the spread of Zoroastrianism in its institutional form and perhaps other forms, the Kayānid legends were spread and the Sasanians claimed to be from their lineage in order to legitimize themselves. This was the reason for which the Achaemenids were omitted, or better said, pushed aside from the official history / collective memory which was a sacred history created in Late Antiquity in Persia. The formation of communal identity was a major development in Late Antiquity which affected not only a single religious community's behavior towards people of other confessional religions, but also affected the way in which they perceived their past history and their heritage. For this very reason, the Sasanians who had risen from the same province as the Achaemenids, chose to connect themselves to the Kayānids who were the rulers of *Ērān*, and let the Romans keep the history of the Achaemenid kings.

46. M. Back, *Die Sassanidischen Staatsinschriften*, Acta Iranica 18, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1978, p. 326; G. Gnoli, suggests that the Sasanians saw the Achaemenids as their forefathers, *The Idea of Iran: An Essay on Origins*, Rome, 1989, p. 119; *idem.*, "L'inscription de Šābuhr à la Ka'be-ye Zardošt et la propagande sassanide," *Historie et cultes de l'Asie Centrale préislamique*, P. Bernard and F. Grenet, eds., Paris, 1991, pp. 57-63.

47. I. Gershevitch, "An Iranianist's View of the Soma Controversy," P. Gignoux and A. Tafazzoli, eds., *Memorial Jean de Menasce*, Louvain, 1974, p. 53.